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Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
Proposed H.B. 5726: AN ACT CONCERNING THE SEIZURE OF ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLES.	Support

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first nonprofit conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. For over 125 years, CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly on various State Park and Forest, trail recreation, sustainable forestry, and land conservation issues.

CFPA, along with our amazing volunteers and partners, established and maintain the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails which stretch over 825 miles and span in 96 municipalities. Since its founding in 1929, this system of generally long, linear trails has crossed jurisdictional boundaries (private, municipal, and state) and is a challenge to keep connected and well-maintained for continued use and enjoyment by the public. The various landowners who host Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails expect that these trails will be footpaths only.

Although we know there are many ATV riders who responsibly ride their vehicles with permission on private land and other places where they are legally allowed, one of the most vexing problems for CFPA and its volunteers has been the illegal use of ATVs on several trails around the state. ATVs can create dangerous conditions for lawful trail users, can cause significant damage to trails and surrounding natural habitats, and can be dangerous to ATV riders themselves when they operate in places that weren't built to sustain motorized vehicles. In addition to the direct impact that ATVs have on trails, I can say from experience that few things are more deflating to our volunteers who take pride in maintaining hiking trails for the public than to see their hard work damaged by illegal users.

H.B. 5726 would extend to all municipalities the current statute (Sec. 14-390) which allows for municipalities with populations over 20,000 to seize ATVs operated in violation of a municipal ordinance. I think this is a common sense extension of the law, since the current floor of 20,000 citizens is arbitrary and doesn't reflect the impact that ATVs may be making in communities with lower populations. We further understand that this bill is authorizing, and it still would be up to a community to determine whether or not to have an ordinance that would allow for ATV seizure if it is used in violation of its locally-approved ordinance.

I thank the Committee for raising H.B. 5726 and I hope you will support it. Thanks for the opportunity to testify, and I would be glad to respond to any questions you may have.